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Pakistan and the Afghan Refugees

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Afghan refugees in Pakistan have not become a heavy economic or political liability for Islamabad. Frictions between them and Pakistanis could grow, however, and lead to serious problems for the government. A sharp increase in tensions between Pakistanis and the refugees would erode political stability in Pakistan and perhaps cause Islamabad to seek an accommodation with Kabul and Moscow.

The Refugees

Pakistani Government registration figures indicate that about 2.8 million Afghans are in Pakistan. multiple registrations, the registration of nonexistent dependents, and failure to delete some registered refugees who have returned to Afghanistan have inflated this figure. Based on reports of discrepancies between registrations and numbers actually in refugee camps, 1.75-1.9 million Afghans are in Pakistani refugee camps.

New refugees continue to arrive in Pakistan, but, according to Pakistani officials, the rate is now 2,000 to 3,000 a month compared to 100,000 or more a month a few years ago. Heavy fighting near the border can still bring a surge—170,000 in the last four months of 1983—but we believe most of these refugees return home when military operations die down.

Most of the predominantly Pushtun refugees reside in areas of Pakistan where cultural differences with the local population are minimal. About three-fourths are in the North-West Frontier Province near the Afghan border, and most of the remainder are in Baluchistan, primarily in Pushtun areas. Less than 2 percent are in Punjab and Sind Provinces. Islamabad plans to transfer about 300,000 refugees to camps in western Punjab, but less than 100,000 had moved by early February.

According to the Pakistani press, refugees are barred from buying real estate or engaging in business activities that would lead to permanent residence, but other economic activity is permitted. Most live in camps near the Afghan border by choice. Refugees are free to live in any part of Pakistan, although Islamabad has restricted the movement of large groups. Some refugee groups that migrated seasonally from one part of Afghanistan to another have tried to follow the same pattern in Pakistan.

Economic Factors

Some Pakistanis claim that the refugees are taking jobs from local Pakistanis, forcing up rents and food prices, and living better than Pakistanis on largess from Islamabad. We believe these claims are exaggerated and that the economic burden for Pakistan has not been excessive. the direct cost to Pakistan of supporting the refugees is about \$180 million a year, or 2.5 percent of the government's budget. The movement of food and other refugee supplies costs Pakistan about \$75 million. Other expenses include salaries for about 6,000 Pakistanis involved with refugee issues, education for some 70,000 refugee students, and support for 85 health units.

Even if the Pakistani cost figures are accurate, they do not reflect the indirect benefits Pakistan receives from the relief effort. between 110,000 and 150,000 tons of donated food—one-fourth to one-third of the total supplied by international organizations—is reexported by the

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refugees to Afghanistan or sold in Pakistan. We believe that the proceeds from these sales generally remain in Pakistan. Pakistani businessmen, such as tent manufacturers and millers, have won lucrative contracts with relief organizations, and other Pakistanis are employed by these groups. The UN refugee organization estimates that it will spend \$62 million in Pakistan in the coming year. [REDACTED]

Some Pakistanis probably have lost jobs to refugees, but US officials report that most refugees have filled vacancies caused by the migration of Pakistani workers to the Persian Gulf states or are doing work done historically by migrant Afghan tribesmen. Because the refugees apparently receive more than enough food from international donors, and because prices have risen in parts of Pakistan where the refugee presence is negligible, we believe that there is little connection between the refugee influx and inflation. Nonetheless, US officials report that pressures generated by the refugees have had some impact on rents, at least in Quetta and Peshawar. [REDACTED]

The 70,000 Afghans being educated by Pakistan constitute only a small percentage of more than 1 million Afghan refugee children in the country. Moreover, less than 1 percent of Pakistan's medical personnel are assigned to refugee health centers. Pakistanis who lack adequate health care or whose children cannot go to school, however, are likely to believe that they suffer from the diversion of resources to the refugees. [REDACTED]

Law and Order

US officials report that many Pakistanis believe the refugees have been a primary cause of growing crime and disorder in the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan. The evidence is contradictory. Refugees have committed some murders and robberies, and fighting between rival insurgent groups has occasionally broken out in Pakistan. According to the NWFP refugee commissioner, however, the crime rate in the province has not increased since the refugees began arriving. He believes a whispering campaign has linked refugees to every unsolved crime. [REDACTED]

Violence has increased in Kurram Agency, where there have been serious clashes between rival Shia and Sunni Pakistani tribes. Their dispute is centuries old, but we believe that the arrival of enough Afghan Sunnis to double the Agency's population has contributed significantly to sectarian tensions. In the Khyber Agency, on the other hand, an increase in violence has been sparked by government efforts to eliminate heroin production and appears unrelated to the refugees. [REDACTED]

Future Problems

We do not expect tensions between refugees and Pakistanis to become a serious problem. There were more violent incidents and protests against the refugees in 1983 than in previous years, but the number was still small, and we know of only about a dozen serious incidents. [REDACTED]

In some circumstances, however, government and popular attitudes toward the refugees could change markedly, and the situation could deteriorate:

- If there were a significant decline in jobs for Pakistanis in the Gulf, competition between returning workers and refugees could become severe enough to lead to violence.
- If foreign assistance declined, Islamabad would have to assume more of the relief effort and cut back on other Pakistani programs or reduce support for the refugees. The latter option might cause a violent reaction in the camps and greater refugee pressure on local economies.
- If Soviet military pressure drove hundreds of thousands of additional Afghans into Pakistan, facilities in areas where most refugees now live would be overburdened, lowering living standards and increasing tensions. If the government tried to move the refugees to other areas, it would meet resistance both from Afghans unwilling to leave the border areas and from Pakistanis in non-Pushtun areas.

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- If the refugee stay is prolonged, overgrazing by refugee herds and the felling of trees for firewood could cause an economic decline that would increase antirefugee sentiment.
- As the refugees come to see themselves as permanent residents, competition for political power could also become a problem. Baluch tribesmen, for example, fear that Pushtun refugees will join the large number of Pakistani Pushtuns in Baluchistan Province and seize political control [REDACTED]

If the refugees become a serious economic burden or if tensions between refugees and Pakistanis cause serious civil disorders, we believe Islamabad would be more amenable to an arrangement with Kabul and Moscow that facilitated the return of the refugees and ended Pakistani support for the resistance. Should many of the refugees nevertheless remain in Pakistan, as we believe likely, the task of integrating them into Pakistani society would be difficult, and Islamabad might be saddled with a permanent refugee community. [REDACTED]